

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

Arvin-Edison Water Storage District and Metropolitan Water District 12-Month Water Exchange Project

Draft FONSI-11-085

Recommended by:

_____ Date: _____
Chuck Siek
Supervisory Natural Resources Specialist
South-Central California Area Office

Concurred by:

_____ Date: _____
Randy English
Chief, Resources Management Division
South-Central California Area Office

Approved by:

_____ Date: _____
Acting Deputy Area Manager
South-Central California Area Office



Introduction

In accordance with section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, the South-Central California Area Office of the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has determined that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required for the Arvin-Edison Water Storage District and Metropolitan Water District 12-Month Water Exchange Project.

This Draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) has been completed to document the findings of Environmental Assessment (EA) 11-085 that was prepared to examine the potential direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of the Arvin-Edison Water Storage District (AEWSD) and Metropolitan Water District (MWD) 12-Month Water Exchange Project.

Background

In December 1997, AEWSD entered into a long-term Water Management Program (Program) with MWD. Under the Program, up to 350,000 acre-feet (AF), after a 10 percent loss is applied, of MWD's State Water Project (SWP) supply could be banked within AEWSD's groundwater bank at any one time. Upon request, AEWSD would return MWD's previously banked SWP water. This would typically occur during certain dry hydrological periods when MWD needs to supplement its water supply.

In December 2009 Reclamation approved an EA/FONSI to deliver of up to 40,000 AF per year of AEWSD's Central Valley Project (CVP) supplies to MWD in-lieu of pumping with the return of a like-amount of MWD's previously banked SWP supplies under the Program. In September 2010, Reclamation approved an EA/FONSI for similar exchanges.

This Proposed Action is similar to the exchange approved in 2009 and 2010, which was made possible due to the temporary consolidation of the CVP and SWP places-of-use and points-of-diversion from June 2009 to October 2011.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action would:

- 1) Deliver AEWSD's CVP water to MWD in exchange for previously banked MWD SWP water in order to reduce energy use and associated costs (note: MWD delivers to AEWSD first);
- 2) Deliver up to 100,000 AF of AEWSD's CVP water to MWD during times when AEWSD supplies exceed current demand after which MWD would return a like amount of SWP water, metered at the California Aqueduct to AEWSD later in the 12-month period.

Both actions would require a temporary change to Reclamation's Consolidated Place of Use and Friant Division Place of Use through petition of the State Water Resources Control Board, which is currently under review.

Reclamation's finding that implementation of the Proposed Action will result in no significant impact to the quality of the human environment is supported by the following findings:

Findings

Water Resources

The Proposed Action would not increase groundwater pumping from what has historically occurred within the Kern County Subbasin by AEWS D, but has the potential to reduce groundwater pumping. Surface water imported into the district is used to recharge the groundwater through AEWS D's many spreading works if not used directly for agricultural irrigation purposes.

Aside from the 10 percent loss factor left in the groundwater bank as part of the Program, there would be no net gain or loss to groundwater levels underlying AEWS D from implementing the Proposed Action. There would be no measurable changes to the groundwater basin underlying MWD since the water would be used for municipal and industrial purposes, and little, if any, water would seep into the groundwater basin. The supplemental water would be used to satisfy current customers' needs and could alleviate the region's reliance on groundwater pumping; however, groundwater pumping as part of the region's conjunctive use practice would continue as has historically occurred and would occur with or without the Proposed Action.

The Cross Valley Canal (CVC), CVP and SWP facilities would not be impacted as the Proposed Action must be scheduled and approved by Kern County Water Agency (KCWA), Reclamation, and Department of Water Resources, respectively. Existing Aqueduct Pump-in Facilitation Group guidelines would be followed by both AEWS D and KCWA when introducing water into the Aqueduct to insure that water quality would not be adversely impacted.

No adverse cumulative impacts to water resources would occur as the Proposed Action would likely have similar results as the No Action Alternative as surface water would be delivered to the same general area for irrigation and recharge.

Land Use

AEWS D would not experience a decrease in water supply that would impact existing irrigated farmlands within its service area, nor would the banked water be used to cultivate native or fallowed land that has been in those conditions for three or more consecutive years. MWD intends to use the exchanged CVP water to supplement its water supplies for existing municipal and industrial purposes within its service area, and would not contribute to any potential expansion within the area. Therefore, the Proposed Action would not have any impacts on existing land use.

In recent years, land use changes within the San Joaquin Valley have involved the urbanization of agricultural lands. These types of changes are typically driven by economic pressures and are as likely to occur with or without the Proposed Action; therefore, no cumulative effects to land use are expected as a result of the Proposed Action.

Biological Resources

The Proposed Action would not involve the conversion of any land fallowed and untilled for three or more consecutive years. The Proposed Action also would not change the land use patterns of cultivated or fallowed fields potentially having some value to listed species or birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Since no natural stream courses would be affected, there would be no effects on listed fish species. No critical habitat occurs within the area affected by the Proposed Action therefore, none of the primary constituent elements of any critical habitat would be affected. Considering the above limitations, Reclamation has determined that there would be No Effect to listed species or designated

critical habitat under the ESA (16 U.S.C. §1531 et. seq.) for the proposed federal action of approving these exchanges.

Existing conditions, such as loss of habitat due to urbanization and expanding agricultural lands that cumulatively impact listed species and their habitats, are expected to occur with or without the Proposed Action. The exchange of AEWSD's CVP water for MWD's SWP water is not expected to contribute cumulatively to habitat loss as this water would be used consistent with current uses. Therefore, there would be no cumulative adverse impacts to biological resources as a result of the Proposed Action.

Cultural Resources

All exchanges would occur through existing facilities and water would be provided within existing service area boundaries to areas that currently use water. The Proposed Action would not result in modification of any existing facilities, construction of new facilities, change in land use, or growth. Because the Proposed Action would result in no physical alterations of existing facilities and no ground disturbance, Reclamation concludes that the Proposed Action has no potential to cause effect to historic properties pursuant to the regulations at 36 CFR Part 800.3(a)(1), and would result in no impacts to cultural resources.

No cumulative impacts would result from the proposed action as there is no land disturbance or direct impacts.

Indian Sacred Sites

At this time, no Indian sacred sites have been identified. In addition, the Proposed Action would not impede access to or ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites. If sites are identified in the future, Reclamation would comply with Executive Order 13007. This would ensure that no cumulative impacts would occur that could impede access to or ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites due to the Proposed Action.

Indian Trust Assets

Approval of the exchange between AEWSD and MWD would not involve any construction on lands or impact water, hunting, and fishing rights associated with the nearest Indian Trust Asset (ITA) listed in the affected environment. Therefore, the Proposed Action does not have a potential to affect ITA.

There are no ITA in the action area; therefore, the Proposed Action when added to previous and reasonably foreseeable banking activities do not contribute to cumulative impacts to ITA.

Environmental Justice

The Proposed Action would have a slight beneficial contribution to minority or disadvantaged populations as it would help support and maintain jobs that low-income and disadvantaged populations rely upon due to increased irrigation water supply reliability.

Socioeconomic Resources

Agricultural practices within AEWSD would be within historical conditions and would not be adversely impacted by the implementing the Proposed Action. Over the long term, the Proposed Action would benefit AEWSD by increasing groundwater levels and dry year supplies. Improved conjunctive use operations and in-lieu banking could also allow AEWSD's farmers to utilize surface supplies instead of groundwater supplies at times when MWD banks water. This would subsequently help to maintain the economic viability of irrigated agriculture within the district. When added to other similar existing and

proposed actions, the Proposed Action could contribute to beneficial cumulative impacts to socioeconomic resources within AEWSD.

Air Quality

Delivery of water would require no modification of existing facilities or construction of new facilities. In addition, water would be moved either via gravity or electric motors/pumps which would not produce emissions that impact air quality. Therefore, a conformity analysis is not required and there would be no impact to air quality as a result of the Proposed Action.

There would be no cumulative impacts to air quality as there would be no emissions that impact air quality or construction activities that would produce emissions that could cumulatively impact air quality.

Global Climate

Electric pumps produce CO₂ that could potentially contribute to GHG. However, water under the Proposed Action is water that would be delivered from the FKC with or without the Proposed Action and is therefore part of the existing conditions. There would be no additional impacts to GHG as a result of the Proposed Action.

Impacts from GHG are considered to be cumulative impacts; however, delivery of water with or without the Proposed Action is part of the existing baseline conditions of the Central Valley and is not expected to produce additional GHG that could contribute to global climate change.

Environmental Commitment Program

This form must accompany all Federal discretionary action approvals that require compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and other applicable environmental laws.

Environmental Document¹: 11-085

On January 14, 2011 the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) issued guidance for Federal agencies to implement, monitor and evaluate environmental commitments identified in Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Statements completed for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This guidance also pertains to Categorical Exclusions when environmental commitments have been identified in order to meet the requirements for exclusion.

The Bureau of Reclamation's NEPA Handbook provides guidance on the establishment of an Environmental Commitment Program (ECP) to meet the CEQ guidance. The ECP is a system designed to implement, monitor and evaluate the environmental commitments identified in the NEPA document. These commitments fall under one or more of the following categories:

1. Commitments where no construction or ground disturbance is involved

These commitments are typically associated with water transfers, exchanges, Warren Act contracts and similar actions.

Required Not Required

2. Commitments where construction or ground disturbance is involved

These commitments are typically associated with short-term construction impacts resulting from modifications to Federal facilities or modifications to non-Federal facilities where there is a Federal nexus such as Federal funds or approvals.

Required Not Required

3. Long-term commitments

These commitments are typically associated with larger construction or ground disturbing activities where impacts to resources such as wetlands, special status species habitat or water quality may occur that require long-term mitigation and monitoring.

Required Not Required

Note: If the "Not Required" boxes are checked on all three commitment categories, no further action is required. If any of the required boxes are checked please refer to the following Environmental Commitment table for a summary of the commitments required for environmental compliance. Please direct any questions or comments regarding the Environmental Commitment Program to:

Chuck Siek, Supervisory Natural Resources Specialist
Department of Interior, Bureau of Reclamation
1243 "N" Street, Fresno, CA 93721
(559) 487-5138 email at csiek@usbr.gov

¹ Environmental Document types include: Categorical Exclusion, Environmental Assessment/Finding of No Significant Impact and Environmental Impact Statement/Record of Decision

Environmental Commitment Table
Environmental Document: 11-085

South-Central California Area Office

Assigned Natural Resource Specialist & contact information: Chuck Siek (559) 487-5138 csiek@usbr.gov						To be completed by [proponent]		
Resource	Commitment Category ²	Summary of Environmental Commitments ³	Timeframe for Implementation ⁴	Verification of Compliance ⁵		[Proponent] Point of Contact ⁶	Verification of Compliance (Authorizing Official)	
				Initials	Date		Initials	Date
Biological Resources	1	The Proposed Action may not involve the conversion of any land fallowed and untilled for three or more years. The Proposed Action may not change the land use patterns of cultivated or fallowed fields potentially have some value to listed species or birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.	Life of project				Project proponent(s) are to contact Natural Resource Specialist named above if any commitments have not or may not be complied with. Failure to notify will result in non-compliance with NEPA.	
Biological Resources	1	Exchange involving CVP and SWP water cannot alter the flow regime of natural water bodies such as rivers, streams, creeks, ponds, pools, wetlands, etc., so as to not have a detrimental effect on fish or wildlife, or their habitats.	Life of project					
Water Quality	1	In continuance of commitments from the Program, existing Aqueduct Pump-in Facilitation Group guidelines would be followed by both AEWS and KCWA when introducing water into the Aqueduct to insure that water quality would not be adversely impacted.	Life of project					

Existing environmental documents: Reclamation would continue to require compliance with all commitments imposed by existing environmental documents, such as Biological Opinions and Programmatic Agreements.
Funding: The project proponent is responsible for all direct costs to implement, monitor and evaluate the environmental commitments described in the following table. The project proponent is also responsible for the costs incurred by Reclamation staff to monitor and evaluate the environmental commitments.

²List category numbers checked on first page

³ Summarize environmental commitments from environmental document completed for action

⁴ List when environmental commitments must start/end

⁵ Verification by Reclamation that all environmental commitments have been implemented and a summary report has been completed as required

⁶ Proponent point of contact may be the individual responsible for a specific commitment or the Authorizing Official responsible for overall environmental compliance

